

Regional Multifamily Decal and Signage Playbook

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INTRODUCTION

More than a third of residents in greater Portland live in multifamily housing and 53% of people in rental apartment homes are “new” residents to the site every year. Garbage and recycling collection at multifamily properties creates unique challenges due to different building types and sizes as well as collection systems.

As a result, the contamination rate (trash in the recycling system) at multifamily buildings is 21% — more than double that of single-family homes in the region. Metro’s most recent [Urban Growth Report](#) projects that 60% of the next 200,000 households added will live in multifamily buildings. This creates both an opportunity and need to improve collection services across the region.

The goals outlined in [Metro’s 2030 Regional Waste Plan](#) specifically require actions to improve multifamily services, including:

- Updates to Metro code.
- Streamlining a color code system.
- Offering additional services.

Regionally consistent decals and signage at multifamily buildings are a critical first step in this plan as they currently vary widely depending on jurisdictions and haulers.

AUDIENCES

The audiences for the decals and signage are:

Primary: Multifamily residents.

Secondary: Commercial businesses and single family residents.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This Playbook describes the decision-making and design processes behind the creation of the multifamily decals and signage. Please use it when creating collateral, social media posts and any other content related to decals and signage.

PARTNERS

Metro engaged several critical partners to help facilitate the process of researching, designing and producing the multifamily decals and signage.

Metro

Responsible agency that convened local government, community partners and funded design contractor.

Local government partners

Staff in all three counties (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas) who work in residential outreach and solid waste directors that provided feedback throughout the process.

Oregon Refuse and Recycling (ORRA) and haulers

Metro shared initial designs with ORRA, and with local governments, to inform and gather feedback from their haulers.

Recycling Partnership

A national nonprofit transforming recycling across America. Based on their experience in recycling research and communication, Recycling Partnership reviewed and provided feedback on initial designs and recycling communication best practices.

Brink Communications

A communications agency that provided strategic wayfinding and communication design.

Verbio Group

A local multicultural marketing and communications firm that provided language consultation.

Community partners

The community-based organizations Centro Cultural de Washington County and Trash for Peace co-led user testing.

Environmental Promoters

Residents living in multifamily homes helped the two community-based organizations do user testing.

RECYCLE OR NOT

The recycling behavior research comprised surveys and focus groups from 2018-2019 which included 600 surveys and provided key insights for Metro's process and valuable information that informed the agency's decision-making:

- Audience attention span is approximately 5 to 7 seconds.
- Simple messaging and imagery are the most effective.
- Descriptive images that show context are most effective.

PROCESS AND FINDINGS

Equipped with the Recycle or Not research, Metro began a process in March 2020 to identify best practices and criteria necessary for effective multifamily decals and signage. The agency performed a landscape scan and consulted with jurisdictional subject-matter experts, seeking to understand how current decals and signage were functioning.

Key findings

Based on the landscape research and input from local government partners, Metro identified key criteria for decals and signage:

- Prioritize bin identification and sorting.
- Be clear across age, language and culture (prioritize non-verbal cues).
- Be visually distinguishable in the cluttered garbage/recycling areas.
- Show individual photos rather than group photos.
- Use four-factor language analysis (Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Simplified Chinese).
- Do not include logos or contact on decals as containers can move.

Using these criteria, Metro developed and presented three decal and signage concepts to local government partners who gave feedback on which two designs to test. Trash for Peace, Environmental Promoters and Centro Cultural conducted user testing with these two concepts over a week-long period with 66 residents at multifamily properties across all three counties. They provided the survey in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian and Chinese and tested two main pieces of information:

Effectiveness: respondents were asked to select which container to use for a series of items commonly thrown away.

Consultative Input: respondents were asked which layout, wording, visuals and images they preferred.

This user testing informed the final design.

BEST PRACTICES

Compiling information from the landscape scan and user testing, language expertise from Verbio Group, and feedback from local government partners and multifamily properties, Metro developed a set of best practices that guided the creation of the decals and signage. These best practices are outlined below and provide guidelines for:

- Wayfinding.
- Word selection.
- Image selection.
- Font selection.

WAYFINDING

Through the landscape scan and user testing, Metro identified the following key areas as best practices for creating effective wayfinding signs:

Create consistency using:

- Message hierarchy.
- Layout.
- Size of elements.

Use accessible type by choosing:

- Strong, familiar typefaces with unique characters.
- Heavier weights with adequate leading/spacing and negative space.

Use accessible color through:

- Use of high contrast.
- Adherence to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Use bold, clean iconography:

- As an important tool for identifying information from a distance.
- To maximize readability.
- To align with industry standards.

WORD SELECTION

A large part of the process was focused on effective words to create informative and culturally relevant decals and signage. Through consultation with Verbio, each piece of information was approached with care, paying attention to:

Language accessibility: ensuring language was accessible to a wide range of literacy levels.

Consistency: ensuring all headers were nouns instead of a mix of verbs and nouns.

Visual accessibility: assessing if long headers compromised the readability or if there was an equally successful alternative.

Cultural resonance: exploring whether direct translations were the best choice or if there were more culturally appropriate solutions.

HEADERS AND INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE.

“Yard Waste” versus “Yard Debris”

Verbio advised that the word “Debris” was at a higher reading level than “Waste.” A word analyzer further confirmed that “Waste” was more accessible for non-native English speakers.

“Recycling” versus “Recycle”

To create consistency and greater readability for non-native English speakers, all headers were in single word and noun form. Metro used the word “Recycling” because it represented the noun form.

“Glass” versus “Glass, Bottles & Jars”

“Glass, Bottles & Jars,” while descriptive, presented legibility constraints. Using the 8x8 as a test of legibility, a longer title reduced cleanliness and legibility, making it harder to read quickly.

“Empty & Dry”

Food and liquid are one of the top contaminants in the recycling system. Washington State Department of Ecology recently launched a campaign called “Empty. Clean. Dry.”

From Metro’s recycling behavior research, the term “clean” was confusing as everyone had different interpretations of it. Metro, local government staff and Brink met to discuss this in Fall, 2019, and concluded the most concise instructional language was “empty & dry.”

TRANSLATION

Often, materials are translated through an approach in which English words are replaced by their literal equivalent. This means content can miss critical meaning. Through the translation process with Verbio, content was grounded in messaging that would resonate most for residents with limited English proficiency. Translations were then reviewed by multifamily residents who were fluent in the respective languages. Environmental Promoters also offered valuable consultation using both their language and recycling expertise.

Russian

Recycling: “Переработка” versus “Утиль”

Verbio recommended “Переработка” as it translated to the actual process of recycling products, while “Утиль” referred to the waste material to be recycled. More specifically, “Переработка” means “processing” while “Утиль” means “utility waste, reclaimable junk, recoverable refuse.”

Food Only: “Только пищевые отбросы” versus “Только пищевые продукты”

Verbio recommended “Только пищевые отбросы” as it means “Food waste only” or “Food refuse only,” whereas “Только пищевые продукты” means “Food products only,” with “Food products” in Russian communicating items meant to be consumed, not discarded.

Spanish

Yard Waste: “Desechos de jardinería” versus “Sólo desechos de jardín o sólo residuos de jardín.”

Verbio recommended “Desechos de jardinería” as a good translation for “yard waste”. They also recommended that either “desechos de jardín” and “residuos de jardín,” would serve as good translations.

Recycling: “Reciclaje” versus “Recicle”

To create consistency and greater readability for non-native English speakers, all headers were in single word and noun form. “Reciclaje” was used because it represented a noun form.

Chinese

Simplified Chinese versus Traditional Chinese

Through research with language experts and community members, Metro found that Simplified Chinese is used to communicate with immigrants from mainland China — most of the Chinese immigrant population in the greater Portland area. The government in mainland China enforced Simplified Chinese during the cultural revolution in the 1960s, meaning more recent immigrants read and speak it. Traditional Chinese may still be used in business signs and information which co-exist with the use of Simplified Chinese. Traditional Chinese is also spoken by non-mainland Chinese immigrants such as those from Hong Kong or Republic of China (Taiwan).

Vietnamese

Addition of Rác

“Rác” in Vietnamese means “trash.” Through user testing, multifamily residents recommended adding “Rác” to all of the headers which provided consistency for the reader and indicated that these were all items to be thrown away.

IMAGE SELECTION

Metro gained valuable feedback from conversations with local governments and Recycling Partnership to understand what images would and would not work well for residents. Through a round of feedback and user testing, Metro was able to refine and identify:

- Images that would be most effective.
- Images that best represented common offenders in the waste systems, i.e the “No” photos.

Residents read and understood signs more easily when paired with images and it was especially important to consider clear and culturally relevant images. When selecting images, Metro:

- Used universally recognized brand names for a quick read, alongside stark color contrast where possible.
- Ensured they were culturally relevant and diverse.
- Used images of economically cost-effective products (avoiding products from specialty stores, i.e. Whole Foods/New Seasons).
- Avoided private labels from major chain grocery stores.
- Identified what images would work well for residents through feedback from local government partners and user testing.

FONT SELECTION

Based on a thorough font study, Metro presented local government partners options with strong, familiar typefaces and unique characters. Using their feedback as well as wayfinding readability tests and user testing, Metro identified the Roboto font as the best option. Roboto is a Google font, meaning it is free to download, install and use on all computers. Please see the style guideline on page 7 for guidance and access. Metro researched and tested fonts for Simplified Chinese to ensure wide accessibility. Based on the findings, Metro selected Noto San SC which accommodates all characters and is also a Google font.

FINAL FILES

The decals and signage provided represent final files. They can be printed and posted in all jurisdictions. Local government partners should not edit or alter the final designs as this creates inconsistencies and confusion for multifamily communities. For any questions, please contact Jill Hrycyk at Jill.Hrycyk@oregonmetro.gov.

STYLE GUIDELINES FOR CREATING ADDITIONAL COLLATERAL

All collateral should mirror the signage — in other words, they should be visually cohesive with the decals and signage.

MESSAGING

Ensure messaging is:

- Direct — avoids puns or colloquialisms.
- Informative.
- Accessible to a wide-ranging reading level.

WORD SELECTION AND TRANSLATION

It is important to consider word selection and translation alongside design. When selecting wording for collateral, please ensure the language reflects that of the decals and signage, considering the following:

Accessibility:

Legible to a wide range of literacy levels.

Consistency:

All headers are nouns.

Visual accessibility:

Concise, easy-to-read headers.

Cultural resonance:

Direct translations often do not communicate as successfully as more culturally appropriate solutions.

NEGATIVE SPACE

Good design creates a positive user experience as it guides the audience through the materials using clear visual hierarchy and order. Negative or white space is an important element in hierarchy. Elements to consider:

- Research shows that people comprehend what they are reading better when there is less visual content and more white space.
- Limit the amount of content that is added to educational materials, especially when they are photos.

Please refer to the signs and decals to gauge the relationship between images and white space.

OVERALL VISUAL DIRECTION

Design elements work together to help create a visually cohesive experience for the audience. It is important to ensure they are all consistent, communicating a clear message.

Elements to consider:

- Color.
- Font.
- Icons.
- Images.
- Grid layout (see page 9 for a detailed explanation).




STYLE GUIDELINES FOR CREATING ADDITIONAL COLLATERAL



Color

Several sources informed the decal and signage background or stream identification colors:

- The garbage (black/dark grey), mixed recycling (blue) and yard waste/organics (green) follow strong national and local trends for stream identification colors.
- Orange has been used as a glass recycling decal color at multifamily and commercial properties for over 10 years in the Metro region and holds up (does not degrade) over time.
- Orange does not have any other garbage stream connotations. For example, yellow represents hazardous wastes and red is used to indicate biomedical wastes.

If a stream-based color standard is adopted in the Metro region that differs from the established decal and signage colors, Metro should review decal and signage background colors.

CATEGORY	Recycling	Glass Recycling	Food & Yard Waste
			
CMYK	92/72/00/00	8/71/100/1	89/30/85/18
RGB	36/89/169	223/106/38	0/117/75
HEX	#2459a8	#de6925	#00754b

CATEGORY	Garbage	"No" indicators
		
CMYK	82/71/59/75	15/100/100/0
RGB	17/25/33	210/35/42
HEX	#111821	#d12229

Font

Roboto is a Google font, meaning it is free to download and install on all computers, and to use for print, digital, commercial or otherwise. Considerations for fonts:

- Headers should be bold and large.
- Instructional language should be bold and medium size.
- Body copy and other secondary information should be regular/light and smallest in size.

[Download the font "Roboto" here.](#)

The only language not supported by the Roboto font is Simplified Chinese.

Noto Sans SC is a Google font that accommodates all the characters for Simplified Chinese.

[Download the font "Noto Sans SC" here.](#)

ROBOTO LIGHT

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

ROBOTO REGULAR

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

ROBOTO MEDIUM

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

ROBOTO BOLD

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

STYLE GUIDELINES FOR CREATING ADDITIONAL COLLATERAL






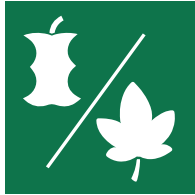

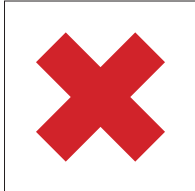
Icons

Icons are important for “stream identification” for people who:

- May not speak English as a first language.
- Have varied visual needs.

Considerations when using icons:

- Use icons locked up with the English header to ensure maximum comprehension.
- Icons should always be white against the respective color.
- Don't mix icons and colors between stream groups.

STREAM GROUPS	Recycling	Flattened Cardboard	Glass
			
STREAM GROUPS	Food Only	Yard Waste Only	Food & Yard Waste
			
STREAM GROUPS	Garbage	"No" indicators	
			

Images

To ensure the style is consistent with the images, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- Photograph all items on a white background.
- Photograph just above eye level.
- Photograph items individually, not grouped.
- Photos should be very well lit with a slight shadow.
- Avoid tightly cropping photos, leaving flexibility for design.
- When possible, turn product slightly to the right.



Jurisdiction sticker placement

Jurisdictions have the option to create a sticker with contact information on enclosure signs and interior posters.

When placing stickers, use 4.25" W x 2" L. This will work for the following decal sizes: 11" W x 17" L, 18" W x 12" L, and 24" W x 18" L.

- Keep layout simple and content minimal.
- Keep all items aligned so it's visually clean.
- Keep color use minimal (ideally black).
- Use this recommended hierarchy:
 - Name of jurisdiction/department should be the largest element.
 - Contact info directly below the name (If including url, try to keep the url short).
 - Logo in bottom right (stack if there are multiple).



Recycling

Reciclaje
Rác Tái chế

Утиль
回收



Plastic bottles, plastic round containers, metal, paper & flattened cardboard, empty & dry



No plastic bags or wrap, lids, glass, garbage





2" L

City of Portland
503-823-7202
Portland.gov/bps/
garbage-recycling



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Innovative Collaborative Practical Solutions



City of Portland, Oregon

4.25" W

Example

DECAL AND SIGNAGE FOR REFERENCE

DECALS

8x8" & 10x10"



6x6"



11x3.5"



24x11"



ENCLOSURE SIGNS

24x18



18x12"



INTERIOR POSTERS

11x17"

